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ABSTRACT

This booklet is one of a series of teacher-written curriculum publications launched by the Bay Area Writing Project, each focusing on a different aspect of the teaching of composition. After a brief introduction in which the writing concepts of fluency, shape, and correctness are defined, the rest of the booklet presents the work of three beginning writers who enrolled in a college writing workshop program to improve their language skills. Actual samples of the students' writing are used to demonstrate their progress in improving their writing fluency, and the techniques used by their tutor/readers are explained. (AEA)

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Writing for the Inexperienced Writer: FLUENCY SHAPE CORRECTNESS

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Preface

How to define the relationships between fluency and shape and between fluency and correctness is a difficult problem for teachers of composition. In this publication, Marlene Griffith describes these evolving relationships in the work of three beginning writers who enrolled in the Writing Center at Laney College, a campus of the Peralta Community College District. These three writers—Grace, Doretha, and Huey—have much to teach us, and Marlene Griffith is an experienced guide who helps us understand. Her insights are a very important contribution to our understanding of the writing process.

James Gray, *Director*
Bay Area Writing Project
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FOR THE INEXPERIENCED WRITER it is important first to develop fluency, then to move from fluency to shape to correctness. To help and not hinder this process, the strategic place of the teacher/reader is between the writer and the piece of paper as partner, not between the piece of paper and a presumed audience as critic. By fluency, I mean the ability to write down one's observations or thoughts or feelings, to think out loud on paper.* By shape, I mean structure, form, organization, whether this be of the piece as a whole, of a paragraph, or of a sentence; it includes sentence patterns and paragraph development. By correctness, I mean such things as spelling and punctuation, the use of the "s" and the apostrophe. I am not suggesting an absolute separation of these categories; one can talk about paragraphing or organization, about the difference between "while" and "because," about periods or spelling depending upon context and need. I am suggesting that fluency is an essential prerequisite to writing, and that to help develop fluency, the teacher/reader needs initially to sit with the writer, on that side of the paper, to be a partner, not a judge, to ask for more detail, explanation, and information only when he/she really does not understand what is being said or is left hanging. In other words, the teacher/reader is interested in what the writer has to say and reads in order to understand or help the writer find what he/she has to say. This is our first function when working with inexperienced writers.

Most of what I say here I have learned from my students at Laney College, many of whom returned to school as adults who had rarely, perhaps never, "written" before. Grace, Doretha and Huey, whose work I use as examples in the following pages, came to our Writing Center, where students could write and tutors could read and we could talk to each other, usually working on a one-to-one basis. I know their work well and I print it here because it illustrates common problems of the inexperienced writer. The general principles of what is described in the following pages can be adapted to classroom or small group situations.

The goals of the following three students were similar: to write easily and well. Each, however, brought a very different set of obstacles and a different set of short-range goals. They came for a three-hour class on Thursday evenings, and none had much time for schoolwork outside the classroom.

*It is a phase close to what James Britton describes as the expressive mode, Janet Emig as the reflexive.

Grace, a handsome woman in her thirties, works in a convalescent hospital and is hoping to enter the Licensed Vocational Nursing program. Asked what she hoped to accomplish at the Writing Center, she wrote, "How to take notes to spell and build a better vocabulary." The first evening she repeated that she wanted to work on spelling and punctuation. Here is her first writing, a letter of introduction:*

My name is Grace H. H_____.
I like to use as a middle name my
maden name which is H_____.
I work as a Nursees Aide in Walnut
Creek. At John Muir Hospital. located
on Ygnacio Valley Rd.
Ive worked the Pediatric Unite for
Twelve years located on the 7th floor.
My gole is to obtain my L.V.N. Licens.
At this point. I feel I have some
problms. On Oct 10th Im schedule
to go on a Toure to Iseral.
My daughter and myself or I
have ben planning for months.
I'm getting very excited the
time is aproaching very rapidly
to travle through the Holy Land
have alway been my desire.
I will leave Oakland via World air Way. Oct 10th
there will be apperoxemy 220 other passangers
We will arrive in Tele-Vive
the following day. where we will spent the
night at the Sharon Hotel

After talking with a tutor, Grace wrote a second version that evening, including essentially the same material, but more connected, and indented to show three paragraphs. Lines four through six, for example, are combined to read "I work in Walnut Creek as a Nurses Aide at John Muir Memorial Hospital located on Ygnacio Valley Rd." Line ten, "At this point I feel I have some problems," is turned into an image, though perhaps a familiar one, that begins this paragraph:

At this point I feel I am wedged
between the rock and the hard place
I will be leaving the class the

first week in Oct My daughter

*All student work is printed as it was written, including the indentations.

and my-self will tour Israel
four fourteen days. I am getting
very excited about my trip
time is rapitly approaching iam
looking fordward to touring the
Holy Land. We are shcedule to
leave Oakland Oct 10, 77 via World
Air Way. Will arrive in Jerusalem

the following day there we will stay
at the Holy Land Hotel. We'll visit the
Dead Sea where the Scrolls were written, and
walk the shower of Sea of Galilee, too Mount
Olive, visit Jericho the oldest city in
world, and most all I will visit the tomb
where Jesus laid.

What helped Grace revise an initial list to what at least looked like a three paragraph paper isn't at all clear. The first evening of a semester is usually hectic and tutors are busy trying to get students started. The tutor who read Grace's first version may have asked for more detail, or suggested divisions, or may just have been impressed by all the information and thus been encouraging. What is clear is that Grace has notions about sentence building and paragraphing which she can use.

The second evening, she began to work with Susan, the tutor who was to work with her throughout the semester, and it emerged that one of Grace's looming obstacles was a flood of thoughts. There were so many that she found it hard to get even close to what she wanted to say or to follow any one thought. She also had no confidence in herself. Susan suggested she do some writing at home, perhaps about the trip to Israel, and noted, "We're going to work toward some security with organization and sentences."* Grace apparently followed Susan's suggestion:

For five years we been talking
about going to the Holy Land
every day I would tell my husband I would
I want to go. oh how I want to go.
I tell him I going to remodle the house,
Re do the yard Buy me furniture, buy a
car he just laugh, and say you are always

*All student work is kept in a folder that also serves as a joint and open record of the semester's work. We use the outside to record attendance, to note what the student hopes to accomplish, is working on, plans to work on next, to comment on past work. I print some of the tutor's folder entries along with Grace's work so that the reader can get a sense of the conversations that preceded and followed the writings.

going to do something. Now when are you
going to the Holy Land. for five years
we have gone through this ritural,
One sunday earyler in the year
I was sittin in Church whin the Minister
said this is your year I dont know who he
was talking to but I felt the message was
to me. he said God is going to
bless you you will be able to do things
this year you've wanted to do for a
long time and havent been able to do
them just ask him for what you want
and start to planning, you dont have to
know where the money is coming from
just starting to planning

Now you understand the Bible say according
to (your faith be it unto you) thist Minister
dosent know me; some day I hope to meet him
and tell him how I was inspired by his message
to get back to the point. I went home
and ask my husband if he wanted to go
with me. he said so you on that kick again
I said yes, well when are you going
I told him in Oct. of course when
he was in the Army he went to Euroup so he
said no if he would stay home and
take care of the house I could take my daughter
but what make you think you can go
what are you going to use for money I said
the money will be there. when you take that
first step of faith.
I have wanted to go to school for a long time
but I work every day I get up in the morning
at five o'clock AM get home after four PM I felt
I just couldnt go to school it would
be too hard for. Im now going
to school three evening per week Tues, Wen, Th,
I leave work com strait to school
From 4:30 to 6:30 Tues, Th to Merritt the same day
from 7:00 to 10:00 sometime I think I meet my self
half way.
when I see Road Runner I think of myself
my time is really running out. between
my home, job, classes checking in on my
91 year old father looking after two dogs

Tutor's folder entry:

> ...Grace wrote two pages on deciding to go to the Holy Land, and the hectic life she's leading now with work, school, home, and plans to go away.
> She has a nice ear for dialog so I showed her how to use quotation marks, both in a book and with her writing. We talked about the look of paragraphs; she understands the idea. She feels like she skips around though, that her thoughts go too fast and something comes in later when perhaps it belonged earlier. This perhaps relates to note taking—we might work on organization.

What seemed to be happening was that each idea generated another, each detail generated another, so that Grace had clutter instead of fluency. She felt burdened with too much to say and a need to say it all in one writing; to narrow, focus, and develop any one idea sufficiently seemed impossible.

This was particularly true after her return from Israel, where within a ten-day period she had seen, experienced, and thought about much that was new and different which we wanted to hear about. But she was dwarfed by the material. She felt—and was—out of control. The evening she returned after her trip, Susan was ill, and I suggested she write her a letter and tell her about the many impressions. The tutor's absence provided a happy accident. The letter could touch on much that was hard to order and show many kinds of thinking; it gave Grace a familiar form and a trusted audience.

Dear Susan

we arrived in Israel tues afternoon
Oct 11. entering into another country is was
only natural we had to go through
custom. so right away
my daughter & I was hauled into
security.
my daughter was scared stiff. yonok
the old saying where ignorent is bliss?
I had no idea what was going on
Security in Israle is very tight.
Every one we had gotten to know on
the flight was look on whe the hauled us
into the Security office.
the question began.
For what did you come here?
Who did you come to see?
do you know any one here?

who are you with?
Are you Chathlic?
No I'm not Catholic I am Pentecostal.
eyes cast around the room what is that?
I just want to visit the Holy Land
I began to give him all of my tour
paper or scequald. I kept shuving them
in his hand.
he said oh so many papers to read.
Now after all this we didnt even open a bag.
Most of all At this time I wish to tell you about,
my mixed emotions about Israel out side
the Holy City.
there is a lot of tension between
the Arabs and Jews.
I find it very hard to under stand
why the are in const war withe each other
the Isrealies say the Arabs took their land
the Arabs say the Isrealies took their
land. I relise the has been going on
for many generation and will go on
for many more to come.
Meny American Jewes have migreated
in Israel.
But boathe the Isrealies and Arabes
give you the impression the wou lik to
leave the area. they seem to be
feed up with politic with fighting
the will do most any thing to get away.
being an out sider looking in
side you feel like they are in a
constration camp.
We visited a tirade school
very beautiful. the chiidren live
there children with out parents, or [from broken homes]
or children from very large family
who cant afford to send there children to school.
Children go to school for free up to
age fourteen (14) there after they have to
pay so if the family cant afford send
them to school they dont get an edqucation
Every on go into the Arm at the age of eighteen (18)
But in the trad school they are
prepared for a job or college.
what ever there decision may be

I will give you more detail
about the school the the name
and whe it is supported by and
jus why I feel the way I do about
meny things you should alsc know
about the warm friendy side.

Tutor's folder entry:

Good re.urn paper. Tension in Israel. Hard to write about something you've just been through so intensely. We talked for awhile. Grace will write some paragraph descriptions of the few of the people she met there who gave her impressions about the tension to end off first section. Then we will do a rewrite. Then a paper about the trade schools "next chapter."

There is much material here for many different "papers." To develop the possibilities, the tutor's response from this point on was almost entirely to the information. They first talked about things in the letter that had piqued the interest of her reader, who wanted more detail, more information. Grace mentioned tension; Susan asked to know specifics. This triggered conversation. Tension was conveyed by people. Again Susan asked to know specifics.

The next writing gave a great deal of specific information on people Grace had met, but it seemed to leave behind the idea of tension. Instead, there is a beginning generalization about the difference between men and women in Israel--hidden, almost lost to the reader's eye, but there. This writing again looked chaotic, but it did not, as we had feared, lead Grace back to the staccato, sometimes scrambled presentation of facts. She worked this second Israel paper (following) through two more versions and it became the stepping-stone to a main idea that surfaced from her own experience, became focused and developed. It is all right, she learned, to leave behind a possible topic or idea, even if half started, no matter how promising, in order to follow another that seems to be establishing a stronger claim.

Grace's second Israel paper:

I became very freendly with any number
Arabs and Isrealies.
on one occasion shall we call his name Isaac
stated he had a brother in the states he write
to him but useing a different name. also
he would like to marrie a Arab girl but his parents
dis prov. on another occasion he stated he

would jus leave to get away from it all.
he also request of my daughter to invite
him to the States. he expressed the fact he does
not like the Army, he want to live in peace.
his name Jacob. who ask to marrie him
that he might be able to come to the states
while another well call him John, just
wanted to talk about the affaires between the
Arabs & Isrellies.

I also met a young lady very friendly
I ask her for her address she appeared to
be a little heaseatd to give it to me
an older woman spoke up to say you
have the address at head quarter

i find meny of the female very
supercilious and some what a little vindictive.

the male is very out going while the female
is inclined to maintane troudition.
The children are very warm & friendly meny of
them have experanced a life out side the shelted
area.

one evening after a long day of touring Israel my
daughter and I was going out to dinner.

we met this hansom young Isrealie
guy about 26 years old Shalom!
Shalom! we replied as to say hello a beautiful
evening. My name is Isaac. what is you name?
beautiful lady he ask. Pinkie my daughter
stated May I see you to night he ask?
My daughter said Call me later.

Are you Americana? yes my daughter
replied. oh I have a brother in the States!

quite unlack the average young American
he also wanted to get to know her Mother also
so later that evening he call. for a visit.

he had us in sticthes all evening.
he wanted to read my daughter palm
why do you let her have so meny boyfriends?

You are very unstable he said to Pinkie
you must make up you mind.
we laughed.

then he explained to us how the young girls
go to get there palms red. from the fortune teller.
and how they tell them all the things
he told her you going to live a long time

you are going to meet a handsom young man any get
married so they go off and marrie the first young
n an the meet and most of the time it turn out to be
a great mistake.
to make points he got of on Religion
and his parents. he use to be Religious,
but now I dont know he stated. God must forget
about us.
Well my parents do what ever they want, then before
the Sabbath they go mic-vek the put their little
barrett on their head any go to the Synguoguy
they must think god is crazy.
mic-vek is a type of bath they take
to cleanse their soul.
he was so funny and we had such a good time
I think he for got his problems for a while. he
really seem to be well relax he just opened up and
talked about meny things we really didnt expect him
to talk about.

In conversation, Grace seemed to come back to her generalization about how different the Israeli men are from the women, and this led Susan not only to ask for more but also to suggest comparison as a form to deal with this particular idea. It wasn't that we needed to "teach" the form; we needed to show Grace the form to fit her content, to help her get to her material.

After another version of this paper that begins: "The men in Israel out going (aggressive) while the women are very reserved and maintain tradition," tutor and student "talked an outline," and Grace took everything home to work on it. She then wrote her final paper on Israel.

The men is Israel portrait aggressiveness
while the women seem more reserved
and, maintain tradition

My daughter Pinkie became very friendly
with any number of young Israeli men
and I found them to be very aggressive
as well as courageous.
on one occasion after visiting with a
young man name Isaac for not more than
an hour without any remorse he ask her
to become his wife, and asked me for my
blessing!
on another occasion while in conversation
with Heim for only short period of time

he assured me of his capability of giving
my daughter a rich and full life, and his
price to me would be thirty camles! Although
I had no insight at as to how I might aboard
the piane with thirty camles instead of one
daughter.

The Israeii women are very
quiet, & modest and, appear to be inrested
in Israeli men only they seem to
stay within their own nitch and
they feel very strong about Keligious
traditions they are good home makers
and maintain traditional customs

Rachel the Wife of Jacob died in
child birth, and until this day the
young women with child visit the Tomb
of Rachel they weep, and pray to Mother
Rachel that they may birth a normal healthy
child.

The one outstanding quality seemingly
possessed by both the Israeli men, and women,
is their profound honesty and sincerity.

Version two had a possible topic sentence, which Grace put in lead position in version three; version four has a topic sentence and conclusion, and what is between sticks to the focus. Grace had found an idea she wanted, probably needed, to develop, and the papers reveal her increasing ability to focus and select. This work was followed by a poem, and from that point on, every one of Grace's writings had a clearly announced opening, often detailed development, sharpening focus. The process had not been easy, but it seemed that once Grace ordered, once she worked out her first "topic sentence" from her own material and her own need, all her subsequent writing had structure (shape). I am wary of generalizations, but it was almost as if she were no longer able *not* to order. Something had been mastered.

The poem is of interest here. After the final Israel paper, Susan had suggested "a character description or a work piece or a holiday piece (comparison) perhaps." Grace elected to compare, but in a poe...

"Think Back"

Think Back,
To America in the days of Old
When All of Gods Children
Did as they were told,

Back to the times when in the schools
How we all abided by the golden Rules,
Back, to when we bowed our heads
To say a prayer,
To thank our God for even the
Birds in the Air.

Back to the time,
When the Church was in touch
And the Preacher didnt use boose
Or drugs as a crutch,

When Homo and Bisexuals
with shame, would hide
and now they're parading
The street with Pride.

Back upon the Court House Squear
A twenty food decorated three; would be there
Now the say in Bakersfield town,
"no Christmas orniments on county ground"

Back to the days
They were oh so sweet
Remember singing, Christmas Carols
With out fear in the street?

Thinking Back,
Looking Back,
on the memories of my mind
If only I could turn Back,

The
Sands
of
Time.

Why did Grace choose to write a poem at this point? My guess is that after the battle she had just won, the security of imposed order offered relief. And she certainly has order here. Not only does she use the poetic genre and the rhyme, but she writes long and coherent sentences in parallel structure. The sentences, however, are almost without meaning. The poem does convey a feeling, but it is also a stringing together of clichés.

Grace has shown again that she knows about structures; she has also shown in the past writings that she absorbs vivid impression, is a keen observer, puzzles, ponders, speculates, infers, works out tentative generalizations and tests these—that she has content. But especially for the inexperienced writer, new content or new thought often results in messiness

before it yields to or finds its shape—as if ready-made shapes generate ready-made thoughts. Grace's task has been to find her content, let it find/take shape, make the shape fit what she is struggling to say. The process of writing and the process of finding are here simultaneous. The struggle became easier, and the next two months' work seemed to consolidate her achievements.

We always try to work from what students have written. Noting that the poem was "about the old days, especially about the holiday season," Susan most likely suggested "a memory piece on a Christmas that she remembers as special. Why was it special? *Lots* of description." Grace next wrote three pages of childhood Christmas memories with a great deal of vivid detail and not one cliché, but again rather too rambling and all-inclusive. Her next Christmas story, however (see below), set in the present, has detail, and a beginning, a middle, and a conclusion that not only draws together what has come before but also brings it to a new level of understanding and a new level of abstraction.

My Christmas Story
Its Joys and its Sorrows

Christmas in my family was always filled with glee. And as for me, when I grew up, I lived to see my mother's eyes light up with surprise just as she had made mine light up, when I was a young child.

I would turn the shopping centers up side down, to find just <u>one</u> little thing I knew my mother wanted, but didn't expect to get.

I would do anything to make her happy because she was my very best friend, and I wanted her to knowit, and feel it.

I was the year of 1956 just twenty one years ago. she wanted a toast master, so I felt she must have the best money could buy. on December 21 about 3:30 or 4 o'clock in the after noon, I took my daughter was five months old at the time along with my two nieces who were age two and four years old to my mother's to keep while my sister & I Christmas shop. I remember my mother looked very tired, but she never complained. After shopping my sister went by my mother's to pick the childrens up, therefore I didn't see my mother again.

On the following morning I tried a number of times to reach my mother by phone, but I decided she had gone Christmas shopping, since

my attempts was to no avail.

Again along with my sister I went shopping. we came home about 6 o'clock tired and very low in spirit. My niece who was baby sitting for us ran out us "Oh where have you guys been? dont you know your mother is dead? "Please for heaven sake we are to tired, and sick in side to hear jokes suddenly she ran in side crying...we knew with out a doubt then that it was true my mother, dead.

I went into complete shock. I was unable to face facts. My whole World had fallon apart, for me Christmas became a thing of the past. When any one talk I was unable to retain any part of their conversation. When I ~~began to~~ relise what was happinging to me, I called my Doctor, and knowing the relationship between me, and my mother he was very concerned.

He sat down and talked with me at great leinth. It was then I began to pull my self together and face facts. I knew my mother would want me to go on living. And how wrong it would be for me to inflect my selfish emotions upon my young daughter, who after twenty one years is now my best friend just as my mother was. Christmas will never be the same, but again there is

glee,
Joy,
and Happines.

In the first finished piece of the next semester, "Why I Returned to School," Grace seems to integrate a new competence as she talks about gaining confidence. She no longer is victim to that flood of thoughts that never let her get near saying anything. This is a fluent piece of writing that describes, reflects, interprets, analyzes, anticipates; it also moves easily among levels of abstractions, and that keeps its focus clear.

"Why I Returned to School"

Returning to school was an enormous step for me.

I ve never classified myself as a brain, but when I entered Junior High I was doing OK.

It was when my father decided to sell his farm, and move to a brand new community, which

caused a sligh delay in getting settled in school that semester. And before the semester ended, I had a very damaging experience with my teacher.

It was an independent school, and every body, but every body in that school was related in one way or another. the school was owned, and operated by one family, and we (meaning my brothers and sisters) were complete outsiders.

I was so afraid of my teacher I felt like a little mouse. her face looked like an orange peeling, and she had one glass eye, and I was never sure if she was looking at me or some one else.

All day long she sat there with a hair pin through her skirt scratching, and that glass eye staring at what no one knew.

If I ask her to explain something to me she would expose me to the class, and find some way to embarrass me. I remember going up to her desk asking her to explain a simple math problem, and it was simple. Never the less I didn't under stand. it. She waited until the next day, and presented my problem to the whole class.
every one laughted so hard it made me feel like I didn't have the ability to function like the other members of the class.

Meny times I have enrolled in classes, and because I have a complex about going to school I always drop out.

I made my disecission to return to school after over hearing an instructor informing her studants on how one can be effected by an emotional on set that occure in early school years. I kept thinking about that conversation, and remembering the experience with my teacher. eventually I got enough courage to discuss my proble with her. I really laid it on the line, and left no stones unturned.

I am now looking for a solution to my problm. I told her I had a very bad complex, and the meny times I attempted to take classes, and drop out. the formular she gave me seems to work quite well. she adviced me to take one class, and no matter tough it get stick to it and dont drop out once "she said you complete

a class you will have accomplish an astablishment
of self satifing condivence in your self."
The formular that instructor gave me seem
to really work for me, because in pertisipating
in this class, and several other classes. an
entire new avenue of thoughts have open for me.
Now I have courage, spunk and guts.
I am upward bound.

Close scrutiny of Grace's work during the semester reveals that not only essay and paragraph structure began to emerge as she achieved fluency, but sentence structure as well. Initially, Grace used few coordinating conjunctions and did not subordinate; sentences were often thought fragments, punctuation was omitted. For instance: "At this point I feel I am wedged between the rock and the hard place I will be leaving the class the first week in Oct my daughter and my-self will tour Israel four fourteen days. I am very excited about my trip time is rapitly approaching I am looking fordward to touring the Holy Land."

The first Christmas story, however, includes sentences such as the following:

My mother raised chicken and guines for laying
eggs to sell and she would have boxes and boxes
and boxes of eggs she kept at a moderate temperature so they would keep fresh yet not freeze.
About the end of November or the beginning of
December when the price of eggs would go up, my
mother would take the eggs into town and sell
them. This is how she made her money, to pay
Santa Claus.

And here are the concluding sentences of the two Christmas writings:

[She told me] I did not have to get anything I
didn't want to prove anything to my friends because if I had to do that they werent my friends
anyway they were only little busy bodys.

And how wrong it would be for me to inflict my
selfish emotions upon my young daughter, who
after twenty one years is now my best friend
just as my mother was.

The structure became more complex, the paragraphs became visible, and the whole piece became less a pastiche and more a controlled,

deliberate piece of writing. At this point, content determined shape; need found structure.*

In some ways, our Writing Center offers almost ideal conditions. Grace worked with an experienced and sensitive tutor in a one-to-one relationship at her own speed. In other ways, the conditions sound more ideal than they are. We have few materials. We have no space for small group work, where students may function as each others' readers or work jointly on such tasks as sentence combining or more mechanical practice with punctuation or quotation marks. We do a little bit of reading each other's work when we can, but one room and much noise make that difficult. We initially had over thirty students and only three experienced tutors, and Grace herself was often so weary from a day that started before 6:00 a.m. that by the time she came to the Writing Center at 6:00 p.m., she found it hard to concentrate. Many of the "spelling" errors may well be fatigue errors. And Grace still has a long way to go. She finds it difficult to write when she is not "inspired," and she is so bound by context that what gives her a fine start often becomes an impediment. How to approach, focus, and select her material presents ongoing questions. Then there are the more mechanical problems of how to deal with direct and indirect quotations, lead-ins, transitions. But she feels better about her writing. Organization is no longer an anguished struggle, everything she says makes a point, and much includes thoughtful reflection that also moves the reader to a new understanding.

So by fluency I mean more than simply filling the page. Some inexperienced writers come with too much to say; a beginning triggers a flood of thoughts, memories, and ideas with no way to get to the material. Some have seemingly nothing to say; the first statement is also the last: "There was a lot of tension," or "Marine World was fun." What more? The first does not know how to focus, the second does not know how to open the questioning, to find the material that lies behind the statement. Paradoxically, these are the same coin. For both, the teacher/reader needs to respond to what is there, to ask the questions that will help focus or help unearth the material. The aim is to help the inexperienced writer become his/her own question-asker, to show how he/she can move from a statement to the facts or evidence, from the abstract to the concrete—or how to move from the facts and memories to the meanings. The teacher/reader's place is between the writer and the paper, and his/her function is to help the writer get a clear sense of experience, through talking, writing, thinking; a clear sense of audience, of someone out there who wants to know and hear; and thus, a trust that one's own experience, one's point,

*Most adults and adolescents have available a range of forms and genres. It is a mistake to think we need to start from a "beginning" just because they are inexperienced as writers. If we wish to let students find their way "back into the center of their own learning" (a phrase I learned from Pat D'Arcy), then we need to follow the student's sequence and let that teach us.

is valid, acceptable, worth saying. Sometimes it is only trust in that first audience that lets the inexperienced writer, in turn, begin to trust the validity of that inner voice.

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Doretha helped show us this truth. And she showed us again how complex structures often emerge once students begin to write fluently.

Doretha, also a student in our Thursday night class, was so shy in the beginning that it was hard to hear what she said; her eyes were usually down, and she used a hard-lead pencil that was difficult to read. Asked what she hoped to accomplish at the Writing Center, she wrote, "To imprould my writting ability and spelling I really needed lots help spelling and writting ably to write I should know to spell good. But I have so much problems with spelling."

She did not seem to have the notion of written sentence and paragraph structure that Grace had brought with her (cf. p.3). Doretha's first writings were often very jumbled, with wide gaps between ideas, between sentences, sometimes within sentences. Fluency seemed far off. Here is her very first writing:

Sept 14, 1977

I Doretha like very much to readed more
about other people way of living in there
countries. Because as child grown-up up. I
Love to readed and studies geograph class.
Because I felt that I did very good in my
geograph class. Because I know that the place
that I have read about I would problemly never
visit them. In one of my famlies Life class
I really learned great deal more about children's
education systems. That what I really felted In
Love with. as child growting living in mixed
neighborhood I think that what really brought
my interest in other peoples. I would like
very much to become probation office. Because
I understand children'ts really well. Because
grown-up up bring shy I felt Like I did more
harm did good to my self in the education leave

She next wrote a long, detailed piece about a childhood friend, Mary, another about a high school friend, Sheila, and then one about her recent work at Howard Junior High School.

Oct 12, 1977

I injoyed myself working with the boys and girls. This give me opportunity to understand girls, and boys behavior. Problems growning up. Problems that thay are having relative with school problems. Just thing School in the are that is more important to function ever day Of life. In the area Language, development mathematics reading, and writting development.

I know that I have these problams In those are. I do not want my children to gr w up with this type of handicaps.

That wen I decide to come back to school to over come my handicaps. Where I would be able to help my childern'ts grow-up intelligence.

Working as campus supervisor give time to be with my family. Give me the opportunety to have time to fixed breakfast for. my son and to enjoy him before he goes to school. The hour is just wonderful give me opportune help my son with hes homework.
Spent time talking together as family what he learn at school also give me a go back to school. Learn to help my-self, and my family. The main reason that I Love my job is because imjoyed working. with the students gives me opportune to be home with my family.

Conversation between Doretha and Teta (her tutor) was almost always about what Doretha was saying or trying to say, getting onto paper what was left in her head. "You wrote so fast," Teta would say, "because you were thinking so fast that sometimes you left out important words. So what did you intend to say here?" Or, "All of us who try to write leave out words sometimes. Now I just really don't understand this. How can we say it so it will be clearer?" They spent most of their time reading aloud and rereading, spelling words Doretha had skipped or stumbled over (words such as "family," "opportunity"), occasionally correcting usage or dealing with such matters as quotation marks and apostrophes, but chiefly filling in connections, words, syllables. The emphasis was on correcting, and Doretha often rewrote a first draft. At first, Teta read to Doretha while both looked at the page. Eventually Doretha began to read to Teta, and by then she often recognized her own mistakes or omissions, and would stop and say "I left out a word here" or "How do you spell 'heavy'?"

Gaps notwithstanding, Doretha soon revealed natural powers of observation and understanding. Much of her writing was about her seven-year-old son, Savori, and about her own problems in adequately expressing her ideas. Although her progress this first semester was labored and her attendance sporadic because of transportation and child care problems, it does seem that as she herself began to trust the authority of her own thoughts she also began to write more fully, more specifically, almost more loudly.

Nov. 4, 1977

I like very much to observe my son. while
he studies hes school work is watching television
or just playing. This would give me a chance
to study he behavior patterns. I am interested
at the different ways his body changes when
Savori is studing. His body turns and twists
constantly. Then all at once he will jump up
and run over to me, saying, "Mon, can I have
some ice cream and glass of milk?" Then Savori
will walked away laughing to him self or just
smiling. Then he will reply "Thank you Mom...."

Nov. 16, 1977

I cannot remember the exact day when Savori
father asked me. if could Savori have these
playing cards that is over hes home.

I thought about it for serveral days.
Before retured hes answear. The reason that
I throught about it first. I throught it will
be a bad image for Savori. Or give him bad
influence toward gambling. But those cards
turn out to be excellend education tools and
trainning equipments for Savori.

To learn. for esample given Savori
opportunity to learn to recognize numbers.
Also develop his mind toward concentration.
In the games that Savori and I plays. Savori
will be involved learning how to add and subtract
numbers. Savori will be thinking how much fun
its' to to be playing with these cards. He
want know that hes learning math.

Jan 4, 1977

I were at home in the kitchen part of the house setting at the kitchen table.... I said to myself I don't want Savori to failt in Life. Because I want him to grown-up be successful person in Life. I want him to be proud of him self. Because don't want him to have problams that I an having In School. Personly I feel that I an force Savori to hard. He would set there at and say to me You allway picking on me and start crying. Then I will feel my-self getting very mad at my-self. Because don't want him to be like me having all the problams. Then I will explan to him that peoples make fun "of peoples who are not smart. Then I will reply you can stop working. go watch your pictures. For working so hard you can have some ice cream or chocolate milk to drink.

I include the next two pieces, not because they illustrate any marked improvement, but because they show such insight into the writing process.

Nov. 16, 1977

I am feeling very sad about my writting. Because I really want to learn how to become good writer. I am very shamed of my writting because I am constantly leaving out words and also miss spelling.... One of the big problam is that I get very nerveless went I an writting. But you know or I an going to be telling my-self try more to relax. I will not make as many mis takes in my writing.

Jan. 18, 1978

...But I refuse to give up. I know I have chang some of my daily program to continue improving my-self throught writing and reading. I am reading more and also writing more. I can see the change in my writing and reading. Its also helping me with my spelling for example in my criminalogy class. Before it were very hard on me to reading my own writing materials.

But now in my criminalogy class. I an able to take better writing notes also I find

my-self reading over my writing materials more
than before. I am also trainning my self not
to rush myself when I am writing; try more to
reflect on my ideas.

On her entry sheet the next semester, Doretha wrote, "I want to accomplish to be able to set down and write a good english papers without leaving out lots of words." She and Teta read aloud together, now also paying attention to sentence and paragraph breaks, using Doretha's voice as a gauge. The natural breaks were often there, so Teta would ask, "Do you think this is a different idea or a different subject? Is your mother doing something different here?" Then, "If you think it's different, skip a line and indent. Now that's a sign that lets your reader know you're shifting." Doretha caught on to the idea within one evening, although it took her considerably longer to apply it successfully.

Following is the initial draft of the first paper she wrote the second semester:

Tonight I am going to write about my mother.
I can remember her when child growing up. I was
6 to the oldest child out of 9 children. In
Pittsburg, California where I grew up. The type
of whether in Pittsburg. Is very wind and cold.
When it rain in Pittsburg it rains very hard type
of rain. I could remember that our mother would
walk to.

Met us at school with newspaper hats that she
had made for me and my two twins sister and brother.
Also carring coat in a hand. Our mother had to
fight her way throw the heavy rain also large
passing trucks. That came off the freeway.
Because of the rain we could not used the field
to go to school. Because of the mud. Our mother
would tell us that to be very carefull going to
school. Because we had to face the large trucks
that came out the freeway.
My sister Celestine, Ernestine, and Scipio went
to school together. When we would see the Large
trucks, we would all stop, together. Where we
could support each other and kept our balance.

Because of haveny rains and wind, sometime
the force would move our small bodies. After we
reached home, all 4 of us would used the back
door to the home. Because there were no sidewalk,
we had to keept in our mind how our mother. Had

taught us how to walk down the mud street.
Without bring in to the house. All four of us
would stand on the back porch and take off our
cloth:s. and hangle them on the cloths line
that our mother made to keept us from bringing
in our wet cloths into the house.

Our mother would have us a change of cloths
to wear.

Mother would have some hot chocolate on the
stove and sandwichs on tables.
I could remember how good hot chocolate tasted.
We would drink some time two three cup hot
chocolate also sandwichs. After we complete
eating sandwichs, drinking chocolate, Mother
would tell one of the oldest childrent help us
with our home work. Then she would tell us
going and clean-up our bedroom and pick up papers
outside. After doing what Mother had said, we
would set down on the porch. and wait for the
rest of our brothers and sister's to come. We
could see the School bus from the porch.

Because we were glade to see them. Mother
would give all us a kiss ask us what we did in
School.

The periods are often in the wrong place; so are some of the paragraph starts. But starting with "The type of whether in Pittsburg" (line four), Doretha has most of the words, ideas, and syllables on the paper. She is also writing complex sentences, however mispunctuated. *The error now is no longer structural; it is mechanical.* She needs to learn not to interrupt her own thoughts, to hear her own phrasing, to become more familiar with the function of the newly learned period and comma. But her initially disconnected word groups have by now become sentence patterns, and these she seems to have taught herself.*

After a paper about her brother and father—which was paragraphed—came this:

No Cry for Help

As a child growing up I injoyed watching.
My mother fixing breakfast or cleaning up the
house.

*Such learning is probably no more (and no less) than the learner's bringing to use in her writing structures that she had gradually learned unawares. Why this began to happen, finally, for Doretha is a central question, but one much larger than the scope of these pages. The support she felt to write what she had to say and the assurance that writing is to be read (by a live reader) undoubtedly helped.

I think I was about or 10 years old when. Something happened ou nother. All at once she became very sick, very w k in both of her legs.

My father believe it was due to the way she had been balancing her meals. He explained to her that pork was the cause of her condition. My father did not want us to mention our Mother condition because he felt that he would really upset her even more. Dad explained to us that we should go along with our daily activities.

"Don't worry your Mother.

Try to extra good children." he said.

As I can remember this start when my two sister's and one brother were In high School. Linda and Brutch were In Junior high School.

Nature Celestine, Ernestine and myself were In Elementary School.

What happened to our Mother all at once? Here leg became paralyzed. My sister's and brother never did see or hear our Mother cry or complain about her condition or feel sorry for herself.

I would stand there in the kitchen with my thumb in my mouth, watching my Mother drag her body through the kitchen frying dinner. Pulling and pushing her self finally make it standing on her knees to cook washing dishes. Our Mother went on with her daily active washing, or Ironing our clothes.

"Our father explained to us. Let you're Mother work as she did before because it makes her to feel like she is still an important member in the family she is still a woman, and a mother."

I can remember my-self looking at our Mother with tear in my eye, saying God please help my Mother to get better.

I don't remember how long it took our mother to get better.

I personlly feel that my Mother got better because.

We in the family made her feel important to her self and us. We did not make her feel like she was a handicapped person. And blessing from God.

If we overlook the misspellings and mispunctuations, and the occasional omitted word or connective, we see a piece of writing that has a clear theme, sticks to it, develops it with telling details and in a strong voice. We also find complexity of thought and sentence. Take, for example, the following:

> I would stand there in the kitchen with my thumb in my mouth, watching my Mother drag her body through the kitchen frying dinner, pulling and pushing herself, finally make it standing on her knees to cook [and] washing dishes.

Verbs create imagery, phrases are movingly vivid ("standing on her knees"), and the sentence itself is a model of Christensen's generative structure.*

Her conclusion,

> I personally feel that my mother got
> better because we in the family made her feel
> important to herself and us. We did not make
> her feel like she was a handicapped person.
> And [because of a] blessing from God.

is perhaps not necessary for the effect of this piece: Doretha has managed to show so vividly that she now need not comment to make her point. But these concluding sentences are necessary for Doretha, the emerging writer, because she here takes the memory she has just described so effectively to a new level of reflection, a new level of abstraction, a new distance.

This is a giant step from her first writings. She too has a way yet to go—not only in mechanics, but (similar to Grace) in being able to write as strongly outside of her own context. By this I mean that if Doretha were given a topic or idea that did not evolve naturally from her own experience (whether this is a memory or an intellectural experience), she would, I suspect, find it much more difficult to bring her own experience to bear on it, to "make it her own" by seeing how it fits into what she already knows or how it tests what she already knows.

But that is, in a way, the point of these pages. Doretha doesn't yet know *what* she knows or *that* she knows. By encouraging the inexperienced writer to write more, and with appropriate response from a trusted reader, we are encouraging the emerging writer to discover not only what he/she has to say, but also to discover that he/she has more ways of saying and thinking about things than we knew or suspected.

Experience in the doing leads to competence; competence leads to

*Francis Christensen, Chapter I, *Notes Toward a New Rhetoric: Six Essays for Teachers*, New York: Harper & Row, 1967.

confidence, and this progression becomes the base for further work. We are showing the inexperienced writer not how to construct a sentence or a thesis, but that he/she does, indeed, construct sentences and theses ("When it rains in Pittsburg, it rains a very hard type of rain. I can remember that our Mother would walk to meet us at school with newspaper hats that she had made for me and my two twin sisters and brother" or "The men in Israel portrait aggressiveness while the women seem more reserved and maintain tradition"). The question at this point is not "What is a sentence (or verb, or fragment, or topic sentence, or thesis)?"—except as an appropriate aside to describe or name what is there. The point is to create or generate the context that permits sentences to emerge. Sentences do not emerge when divorced from meaning and need—the need to convey to someone else, the need to make sense for oneself. And since most inexperienced writers often do not know that they have anything worth saying to begin with, a reader/tutor/teacher must know how to ask questions meant to elicit from the writer what he/she has to say, what needs to be clarified, what is worth telling (How are Israeli men different from the women? How was going to school different for you than it is for Savori?). Then, when words and sentences that carry the new writer's meaning emerge, this increased ease often frees complexity—both of thought and of structure—so that Grace can now say on paper thoughts as complex as these: "And how wrong it would be for me to inflict my selfish emotions upon my young daughter, who after twenty one years is now my best friend just as my mother was." What needs "teaching" finally becomes clear. At this point, what students don't know and need to know may be conventions—where to put capitals, the use of the apostrophe, word endings. Now instruction takes place within the context of the student's writing; the need creates the opportunity.

When and how to teach grammar is another question. We all know how very useful and time-saving it is to share the basic vocabulary that describes how language works, to know *about* such things as verbs and subjects and their relationships. And although it has been pretty well established that this kind of knowledge doesn't actually help the writing process, it provides a useful distance, a way to talk about writing; it leads to editorial control. If a student comes equipped with rules and vocabulary, and is eager to test these or get what he/she is writing "just right," fine. A good rule of thumb is to start where a student is. But grammar instruction shouldn't be confused with writing instruction. The appeal is to two different modes of thought. At this point, Doretha does not need form to generate content or meaning. Given the real limitations of time, to interrupt her momentum now with formal grammar instruction would shift the focus from fluency (what you want to say) to correctness (how you should be saying it), would be teaching the editor before the composer has emerged.

Yet most of the time Doretha and Teta had to work together, they spent on correcting. What seems to be a paradox here, really isn't. Teta's first

response to Doretha's writing was always to the content. But since the page was sufficiently jumbled that Doretha herself could not read back or interpret what she had written, it made it harder to go on or to reflect on what she had just described. To achieve fluency was to unjumble what was on the paper, so Teta and Doretha worked on reading and re-reading, filling in letters, syllables, words, details, finding sentence endings, marking misspelled words, making spelling lists. Mastering mechanics can be a pleasurable sign of progress, both for student and teacher. What made all that fruitful was a shared basic assumption—shared by all three of us, and by everyone else in that room—that the editing and correcting and "teaching" were in the service of fluency, of making what Doretha wanted to say clearer, easier for her.

I think we like to assume that this is always the case when we teach "skills," or even patterns, but it isn't. Skill teaching and practice seem to take on an independent life of their own, often far, far away from writing to say something. Thus, for inexperienced writers, writing usually means getting it right, with no notion of what that "it" refers to. Put differently, inexperienced writers assume writing to be good when it's correct, regardless of what insight, understanding, or idea may be hidden behind the incorrectness.

Huey showed me this most forcefully. He also underscored what the work of Grace and Doretha had been indicating—that shape, at this point, is most often a natural consequence of content, that fluency generates and governs shape. In the course of twenty evenings spread over ten months, his writing moved from twelve lines, usually unparagraphed, to over forty lines, often paragraphed. Most surprising, however, was that his writing moved through so many "rhetorical classifications"—descriptive, narrative, explanatory, argumentative—although none of these had been taught or discussed.

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Huey is a thoughtful and intelligent man in his mid-thirties who read very poorly and could not spell. For the first two periods, he came and sat glued to the dictionary, rarely squeezing out more than five lines an hour. We then set down ground rules. He was not to worry about misspelled words, a hard demand for someone who has never written because of spelling. (How hard it is to permit oneself to make an error gave me some clues as to how relentlessly we teachers focus on error.) He was to make a try at whatever word was in his head and not avoid or evade or regroup to get to a word more familiar; or better still, he was to ask me, a neighbor, a tutor, anybody, or just skip the word. He was to avoid the dictionary, a time-consuming hunt that made it almost impossible to keep any idea, any flow of thoughts going. In other words, his effort was to go into getting down on paper whatever he wanted to say (fluency). When he finished

writing, my first task was to read back to him what he had written. After reading, and after we talked about it as much as we could—and this was never very long, for when he finished writing on the paper he was finished with what he was saying—we worked on spelling and spelling principles, always, of course, using the words in his writing.

I think for Huey, "writing" at first meant penmanship and orthography only; then "writing" also began to mean writing his ideas. At first, he was inevitably pleased that someone else could decipher his words. That someone else could decipher his words *and* understand what he was saying seemed doubly pleasing and probably helped connect the two meanings of "writing," and helped put spelling in the service of meaning. Once he started writing more or less fearlessly, he (like Doretha) was never at a loss about what to write.

None of his writing went beyond a first draft and I never asked for a revision. Time was very limited. He had a particularly difficult boss who often made it impossible for him to get to class; several of his writings deal with that troubling situation at work. He had family responsibilities. He was sick for a while, as were other members of his family. To get his words down on paper was becoming important to him, and working on spelling took what available time there was. His writing included the following:

A process paper:

I am a detailman, a detailman is
one how can take a old car and make
it look like new. To start the job,
you most degrease engine, we use a
chenacal call RS10 we mix it whit
solvent, and thin steam it off, then
dry the engine whit a blow gun, thin
nix you paint it and dreas it....

A character description:

My grandfarth worked in a sawmill I
nevery new my dady so my grand farth
tuck his place. He is a good old man
and I love him as a son could love
his farth. He is a very relegges man
he gos to church every sunday. I can
remaber on sunday how we would have
to run to keep up with him, man he
could walk and we had to keep up
with him....

Thesis-development papers:

The Yankee was a good teme but the
dodgers is a better teme, because
they had the hitter.

	Jackson is a good ball player, but to me he is not worth the money they are paing him.
	I would like to talk about Ale and Spanks. I know it was a good fite, But Ale wanted to lose a fight so he can be the first hadve wate to reclame the titold 3 time....
An explanatory essay:	I would like to tell about Chinese lunar calendar. The Chinese have a dirfferent horoscope than the one we use. This year is the year of the horse, upon which I was born....
An argument:	I would like to know what makes a employer thinks he can own a person just because that person works for him. It is a shame to see a man get huemillyadid just because the auner thinks that because he pays him a sallare he can do anything he want to that man....
A rebuttal:	It's a bad thing when a black man got to steal from blacks in order to live just because he can't find a job. I know you say that's not true, but in most cases for blacks it is....
A poem (although not set up as a poem):	I like to spik that well and true, and whin you can't spik that know good for you. Someone sad shete up my frind and have a sete Oh know my frind I want to spik, because cmunocation is good for you. So tall the world about your dream....

Huey wrote several personal experience papers, including a narrative of places seen and jobs held in the army, an implied comparison between country and city living, an account of a trip to Reno, and a childhood memory piece about Thanksgiving. Some writings were more developed than others, some were rambling or sketchy, but he always found a basic form appropriate to the intention.

Much of Huey's non-writing time was devoted to spelling because that

was the obstacle that kept him from transcribing what was in his head onto paper. An interesting difference between Huey and Grace is that Grace was stopped when she tried to approach her material, to focus and select, while Huey was stopped from transcribing the words in his head onto paper. The minute Grace began, she felt flooded. Much of her tutor's function was to help her find some way into that mass of material that always seemed so ready to burst forth, and help bring that flood into more manageable verbal rivulets. Huey, however, was never at a loss for shape, so much of my function was helping the process of transcription which, in his case, we called spelling.

The work I show here is not *only* possible in a Writing Center with tutors, although to fill the function of the first responsive reader is more difficult in a traditional classroom. But where the ratio of students to teacher is prohibitively high, one can show that reading means wanting to understand (no easy task!) and students can help assume that function for each other and so become part of the process. They often make excellent first readers and a real audience other than the teacher/authority is immensely useful. It reaffirms that writing is to be read. It may also help student readers become better writers since it's often so much easier to see what is missing in someone else's than what is missing in one's own.

Just beginning each day with a ten-minute writing, one which gets read and responded to by teacher or classmate(s), is useful because it leads inexperienced writers back to their own language, their own voice, their own experience and thoughts, and legitimizes these. It also affirms that writing means finding ideas and transcribing what the writer has to say onto paper. What the writer has to say is within his/her experience, whether this is lived experience (memory), perceptual experience (what I see/hear/feel now), reflective experience (what this meant), intellectual experience (what I think in response to, or what I think should be), or speculative experience (what seems possible, probable, questionable). The daily ten minute writing, written to be shared, links the I to the words on the paper. It helps establish that writing is a process, not a sudden miracle.

In the view presented here, writing makes inner experience known by translating it into words and thus putting it outside one's self. But perhaps even more important for students who have academic hopes and ambitions, it makes outer experience known by filtering it through the mind's eye and I, thus letting it *be* known. A major obstacle for so many students I teach is that when they study (from a lecture or a book), when they take on ideas that come from outside themselves, they by-pass the connection to their own understanding, as if something can be known without an active knower. It's hard to think, especially about new ideas, in someone

else's language, voice, experience. Genuine fluency generates and opens up access to thought.

This is true for more experienced writers as well, although then the interrelationship between what I call fluency and shape, the question of what generates what and when, is more complex. But it is especially true for inexperienced writers who need to be shown, more than anything else, how to connect their own thoughts to their own words on paper. For this to happen they need readers, real and alive, who will respond to the "what" instead of the "how." Their most frequent experience with their occasional writing has been a brief judgment, usually negative. But judgment, good or bad, correct or incorrect, is out of place here. At this point, an idea isn't correct or incorrect; it's clear or unclear. It seems important that we relinquish, if only momentarily, our judicial red pens and become question askers, that we teach our students to become question askers for each other and for themselves, and so relate the writing process to the process of discovery.

Most inexperienced writers cannot compose and edit at the same time. The editor (later the devil's advocate) stands between the piece of paper and an audience; as need arises, sometimes immediately, we may teach the emerging editor. But the responsive teacher/reader should first stand on the writer's side, work with the emerging composer, the emerging inquirer. To teach the editor his trade before the composer has emerged with any kind of assurance or authority is to confuse the product with the process.

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